

**The Health Literacy of Hong Kong Chinese  
Parents with a Healthy Preschool Child in  
Seasonal Influenza Prevention and Their  
Health Promotion Strategies at the  
Household Level**

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Doctor of Philosophy

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## **Certificate of Original Authorship**

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I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged in the text. I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Student

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## **Statement of Contributions to Jointly Authored Works Contained in The Thesis**

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A realist review of literature and the results from this thesis have been submitted for publication in peer-reviewed journals through four discrete manuscripts which are presented in Chapter 2 literature review and Chapters 4 to Chapter 6 result sessions. For each of these papers, I have been primarily responsible for determining the research question, undertaking the analysis and drafting the manuscript. Support in all of these areas has been provided by Professor Cathrine Fowler and Dr. Angela Dawson. I take full responsibility in the accuracy of the findings presented in these publications and this thesis.

## **Published Manuscripts by The Author Incorporated into The Thesis**

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1. Lam, W., Dawson, A. & Fowler, C. (2014). Health promotion interventions to prevent early childhood human influenza at the household level: a realist review to identify implications for programmes in Hong Kong. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 24(7-8), 891-905 DOI: 10.1111/jocn.12646
2. Lam, W., Dawson, A. & Fowler, C. (2015). The Health Literacy of Hong Kong Chinese Parents with Preschool Children in Seasonal Influenza Prevention: A Multiple Case Study at Household Level. *PLOS ONE*, 10 (12), e0143844, doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0143844.
3. Lam, W., Fowler, C. & Dawson, A. (2016). The approaches Hong Kong Chinese mothers adopted to teach their preschool children to prevent seasonal influenza: a multiple case study at a household level. *BMC Nursing* doi:10.1186/s12912-016-0172-4
4. Lam, W., Fowler, C. & Dawson, A. (2016). The role of culture in relation to seasonal influenza prevention practices of Hong Kong Chinese parents with preschool children.  
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## **Relevant Published Manuscript by The Author Not Forming Part of The Thesis**

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Lam, W., Dawson, A. & Fowler, C. (2016). Approaches to better engage parent-child in health home visiting programmes: a content analysis. *Journal of Child Health Care*, DOI: 10.1177/1367493516653260.

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# **Abstract**

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## **Background**

Seasonal influenza is a public health concern in Hong Kong. The virus is easily transmitted from person-to-person through droplet and direct contact. Yearly influenza epidemics can seriously affect all age groups particularly those with immature or compromised immune systems such as young children and old people with chronic illness. A Hong Kong preparedness plan and response activities for community prevention of influenza epidemics have been developed. However, compliance rates remain low. Many health behaviours are learned during childhood through parental modeling, guidance, supervision, reminders and repeated practice. Therefore, improving the health literacy of parents through supportive activities is critical.

## **Methods**

Mixed methods research employing a multiple-case study approach was used to gain a multifaceted understanding of parents' health literacy, culture influences and parental-child teaching regarding seasonal influenza prevention and related health promotion strategies. Twenty Hong Kong Chinese parents with a healthy three-to-five year old child from three kindergartens were recruited. A qualitative thematic analysis was employed and quantitative survey data were examined descriptively. These data were integrated and comprehensive comparisons were made across cases to identify commonalities and differences.

## **Results**

Hong Kong Chinese parents demonstrated different levels of functional, interactive and critical health literacy to prevent seasonal influenza. Parents used various social connections including family and community members, social media, the internet and television to access and exchange health information. Cultural values and norms influenced parents' functional health literacy in seasonal influenza prevention. In this study, parents applied five major cultural health prevention practices to prevent and manage influenza. These are: sharing beds with family members or a domestic helper when the child is ill; boiling white vinegar to kill air-borne germs to ensure a healthy

environment; diet therapy to enhance health; self-prescribed Chinese medication to manage child's cold symptoms; and the co-use of Western and traditional Chinese medication to avoid influenza infection. This study also identified five approaches Hong Kong Chinese parents used to teach their children healthy practices including ways to prevent influenza. These approaches included: processes parents used to teach personal hygiene; parent-child interactions during teaching; approaches to managing children's health behaviours; enhancing children's healthy practices; and parents' perspective of the role of the nurse in health promotion. The findings indicate that there is scope to better support parents to apply interactive approaches to help their children establish healthy behaviours.

## **Conclusion**

This study has provided a comprehensive understanding of parental health literacy and the teaching approaches used by selected Hong Kong parents to protect their children against seasonal influenza that may be transferrable to other Hong Kong settings. The findings highlight the need for community nurses to play a central role in increasing parents' health literacy. Pluralistic health systems need to review seasonal influenza preparedness plans to better engage families to support and comply with health advice before the onset of an epidemic. Positive parent-child interaction and teaching should be integrated into health promotion programmes to enhance children's understanding and compliance with healthy practices.